

Curation as Graphic Design

Traditionally, curatorial work was about selection, conservation, documentation, and exhibition. Today, the curator may use the exhibit as medium, utilizing space, scale, proportion, color, and type in support of her concept. Curators who use their work to communicate are, in fact, practicing graphic design.

In my work, the objects which comprise the exhibits are defined by my curatorial view. My voice as curator of these items isn't objective and the exhibits aren't neutral. The individual objects in the exhibits are created by others and are recontextualized by their inclusion.

Three separate projects are included in this show. In them, my curatorial work is informed by twenty years of graphic design experience. As with graphic design, I have used objects (in these cases physical objects) to be thought provoking and express my point of view.

My work at VCFA has dealt with love and loss, mental illness and hope, desire and fear. Through the conception, collection, and exhibition of my projects I have defined my curatorial point of view.

Leslie Tane
October 2013

Collective Collection

What is love?

Tasked with “curating love” through the mail, each contributor became a curator by adding an item to the collection, then sending it on to the next recipient/curator. The collection was accumulated literally and in real time — the one Collection box was sent to all contributors across the United States. Each item is accompanied by a story about the chosen object written by the contributor.

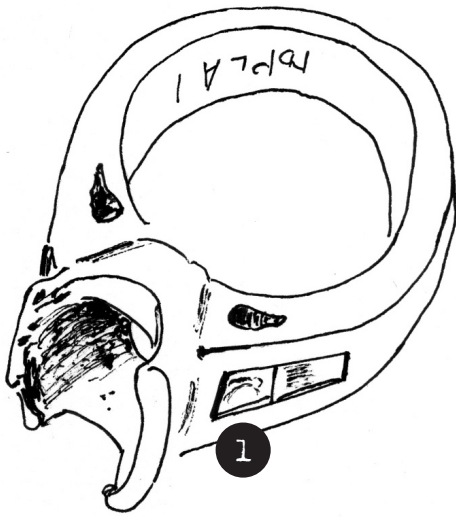
This exhibit explores unique perceptions of love, and the expression of that perception through physical objects. As the collection built, each new contributor saw the objects of those who participated before him. Did the progressive nature of the collection shape the intention of the participants?

Collective Collection uses a participatory model to assemble the collection, which allows for the exchange of ideas. The collection is literally in the hands of the contributors, opening a dialogue for both participant and viewer about the relationship between our perceptions of love and the objects that embody it.

The exhibition itself is a showing of the contributed objects to date and their stories. 54 people signed up to participate in this project—I only had time to send the box to 16 of them. I will continue after graduation and plan another exhibit once all of the objects are gathered.

collective-collection.com

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANGELA MCKAY



CONTRIBUTED FROM
EASTHAMPTON, MA
6.6.2013

Engagement Ring, Denuded

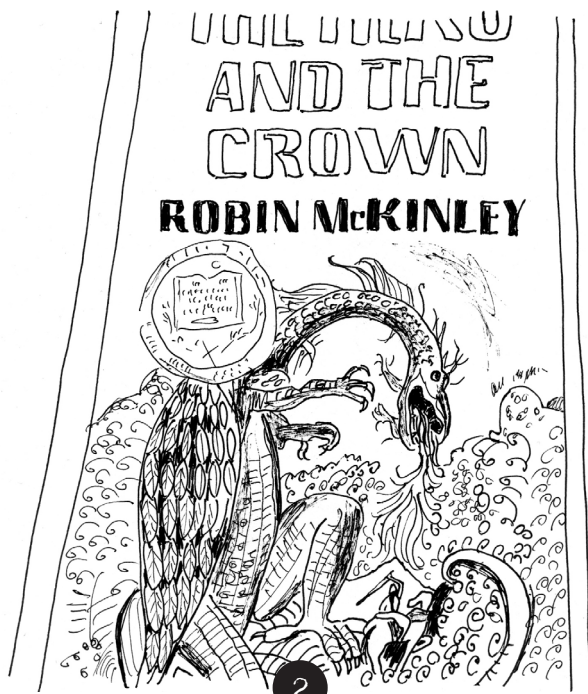
This is my engagement ring from my ex-husband. My grandmother wanted me to have her engagement ring, and when my ex proposed he had the stones from her ring reset for me. I loved it, and it was incredibly meaningful.

About two years after we were married, my grandmother passed away. I saw her in hospice the night before she died and I held her hand and told her that I loved her and that I would see my ring every day and think of her. I'm sure that she heard me. I felt her.

A year and a half later, I was divorced. And I didn't know what to do.

The diamond in the ring meant so much to me, but the ring was not something I wanted to see every day, or ever again. So I had the stone reset again, this time into a necklace, and I wear it and think of my grandmother, who I miss very much.

This denuded ring represents my idea of romantic love. I don't like it, I don't want it. It's been nothing but heartache and pain and sadness for me. I have love in my heart, but I love elsewhere — my kids, my family, my friends. Romantic love is as useless and ugly to me as this ring is without the central stone.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
HOLYOKE, MA
6.22.2013

Cover of *The Hero and the Crown*

The Hero and the Crown is not the first book I read by Robin McKinley, but it's the one I fell in love with. Aerin made me want to be worthy of reading her story.

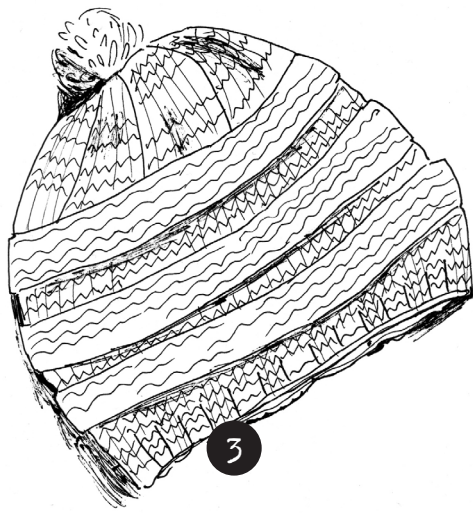
I fall in love with art (meaning visual, performing, written, etc.) all the time, and that's what I call it because that's how it feels. I find the perfect song and I know I'll spend the next few weeks gorging on everything about that song, the way a voice scrapes meaning from a couplet or the way a rhythm underlines the narrative arc. I get stupidly enamored of single guitar notes.

I bask in the presence of what the artists I love have made. I travel to New York City to sit in the Met and stare at El Greco paintings for an hour and creep out the guard by mouth-breathing all over the walls of the Gubbio Studiolo because holy shit how perfect is that thing.

I watch terrible, terrible movies because an actor, or a film composer, or someone else whose work I love, deigned to be involved in the project, and now I am committed to catching whatever fleeting moment of brilliance might be on offer. The actors I love make movies that can be downright scarring (Nazi vampire zombie horse on fire, anyone?) but also emotionally devastating and beautiful.

It is not a coincidence that my husband is equally helpless in the face of his passions. We spent the first year of our marriage besotted with each other and our favorite band, our travels cross-country and internationally forming the itinerary of a fandom and a growing relationship. I still find him most attractive when he is being passionate about something, even when I can't stand the thing he is flailing about. Now that we have two kids, we are both very consciously cultivating this propensity to geek out over stuff they love in both girls. I'm pleased to say it's going well.

But to bring it back to Aerin — her story was the first. That book contains so many things that I eventually grew to recognize as my kryptonite, the tall dark and handsome of my creative soul. That's why the cover's going in the box, because it represents every single book, painting, song, movie, play, that I've fallen in love with, and every fandom I've clasped to my heart, and every kindred spirit I've found.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
EASTHAMPTON, MA
6.28.2013

Infant Hat

This is the hat that my third baby wore home from the hospital. I have managed to hang on to it, plus a few other tiny items, in his upper right dresser drawer. It tugs on all the obvious heartstrings: was he ever once so small, was that really 5½ years ago, did we really almost decide our family was complete without him?

It took five more years after baby #2 to decide if we were going to have another child. I had gone back to work, we were finally a two income family again, we didn't have any more bedrooms....and yet I still really wanted one more baby. So, we decided to have our son. And while we are back to being a one income family, with shared bedrooms and no fancy vacations, we are full to the rafter with joy, comedy, and LOVE.

Chipped Mug

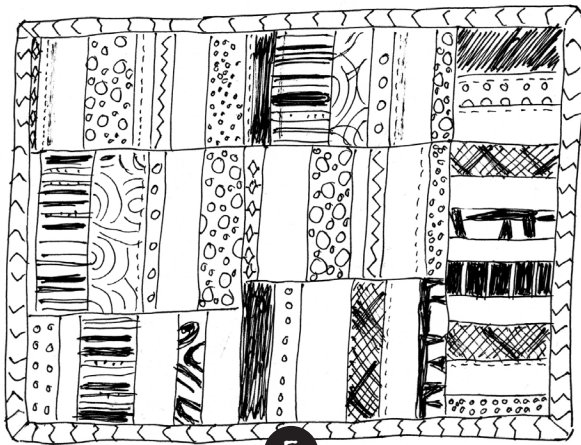
This is the most ordinary of ordinary objects in my home. It's a mug from a local run/walk that my family participates in every year, and every year we fill our cabinet with a half-dozen free mugs we've brought home.

This mug, or one of its look-alikes, regularly appears by my workspace, as if by magic, filled with coffee, green tea, cold water, or a homemade smoothie. Sometimes, when I'm concentrating, I don't even notice its arrival—I just look over and it's there, its contents giving me a boost to get through whatever I'm reading or writing or whatever bills I'm paying.

My spouse is not the surprise-weekend-in-exotic-locale kind. He's the quietly-delivering-cold-beverage kind. I chose to submit this mug with a chip because love is imperfect and unglamorous, and it shows wear and tear sometimes. But even a little banged up, it works just fine.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
FLORENCE, MA
6.29.2013



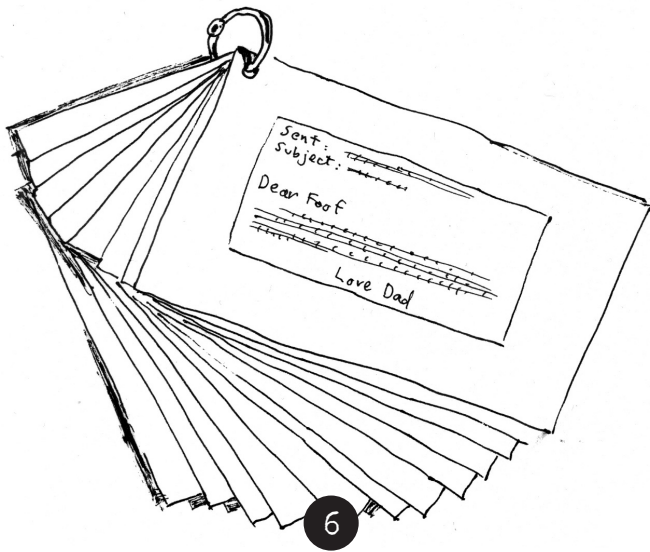
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CONTRIBUTED FROM
SOUTH HADLEY, MA
6.30.2013

Small Quilt

I am a maker. Making quilts is what I do and what I love. What this little quilt represents is the love of the process: coming up with the concept, picking out fabrics, problem solving while standing in a hot shower, sewing by machine and hand, and seeing something through from beginning to end. At this point in my life it is a practice.

Once a piece is complete I am emotionally ready to move on. The end product is almost irrelevant. It is always about the process.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
SOUTHAMPTON, MA
7.6.2013

A series of e-mails, 1996–2001

A selection of what I have left of my dad:

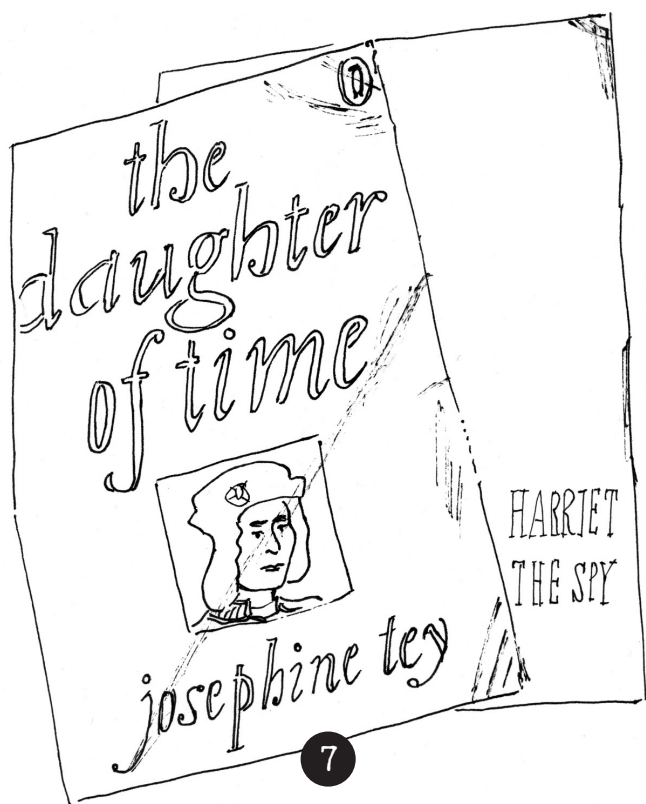
A nearly new pair of Wallabee suede shoes that he wore to work only a few times. My dad was a creature of habit, so he bought the style again and again, replacing the shoes only when they were so worn that Mama told him they had to go. The perpetual newness of this pair reminds me how quickly Daddy's life changed.

His Weather Channel fleece, which I gave him for his birthday the year he got sick. Daddy watched the channel every day, often for multiple hours, so much so that it was a family joke for years. The fleece was perfect for keeping him warm once he was constantly at home. Also, since it was a pullover, his gnarled hands didn't have to struggle with a zipper.

A plethora of family photos, though Daddy often didn't appear in them since he was the main photographer. One of my favorites, which sits on my desk at work, is a picture of him with Mama and my sister. I asked them all to just "be themselves." Dad, of course, is committing fully to a goof-ball pose.

And then there are these e-mails. I didn't have an e-mail account before I left for college, and I swore I'd never use electronic mail for anything other than quick messages. But two weeks before I left for college, I became homesick. Achingly homesick for what I was leaving: my home, my boyfriend, my family. As my parents dropped me off at school, none of us were sure I'd stay. But stay I did, and part of what sustained me through that year were messages from home. Daddy had already latched on to the Internet thing, and since I had to use it for school anyway, we fell into a pattern of e-mailing back and forth. He'd tell me tales of our dorky dogs and the fate of his beloved Ohio State football team, and I'd relate my plans to transfer to another school closer to home as soon as humanly possible. Even after a change of schools landed me a whopping eight miles from home, we kept writing. When I graduated and moved away again, we kept writing. We only stopped once I moved close to home once again and talking over the phone replaced our e-mails.

My memories of my dad are kept alive by so many things, but the love that he left behind may be best represented by these e-mails. I love these notes because they're just so ordinary. I can't imagine that Daddy ever meant for me to keep them for any length of time, but they made me smile so I stuck them in a folder and there they've stayed. I love these letters because they're so chock full of personal jokes, nicknames, and references that I'm one of only a handful of people who can actually read and understand them. I love these e-mails because they show my real dad. They're the words of a man who never stopped moving, whistling, talking, or just plain going until he got sick. His illness just stopped ... everything. My real dad left years before he finally passed away. When I read these letters, I get Daddy back, and I'm able to laugh out loud, both about him and with him, all over again.



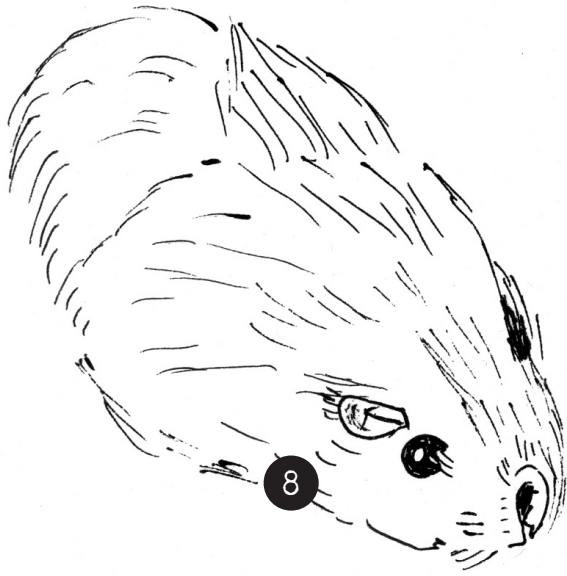
CONTRIBUTED FROM
EASTHAMPTON, MA
7.7.2013

Harriet The Spy & The Daughter Of Time

These books represent my twin loves, reading and history.

Harriet The Spy made me fall in love with reading (and New York City). I wanted to be like Harriet, unafraid to observe the world around me, no matter what I had to do to do that. It also taught me that sometimes you have to step away from the paper or computer and be in the moment in order to really appreciate it. It also made me want to try an egg cream.

The Daughter of Time is even more formative. When I was 12 and 13, I lived in England for a year. When I was first there, we stayed with a family in the small village of Kirby Muxloe and I found this book in the family's library. I read about Richard III and was intensely curious about did he or didn't he kill his nephews. As it turned out, we lived quite close to Bosworth Field, where Richard III was killed in battle and the Tudors assumed the throne. Learning about this period in history has led me to owning a ridiculous amount of books on British history - mainly Plantagenets and Tudors.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
NORTHAMPTON, MA
7.9.2013

Fake Mouse, Missing Nose

While living in Washington, DC I came upon a trio of feral kittens and their mother, who made camp in the alley behind my house. The neighborhood was rough, and animal abuse was not uncommon. On Wednesday, May 16, 2001, a friend and I rescued all of the kittens, took them to the vet, and found them homes. I kept the tiniest, a tortoiseshell, and named her Wednesday. The process of “de-feralizing” a cat involves a lot of holding, handling, and spoon-feeding in order to establish a bond between cat and human. Until that time, I hadn’t known I could feel such a strong sense of love, care, obligation, and wonder towards another creature. Wednesday passed away too soon in February 2011, and I keep a lock of her fur and a paw-print nearby. Her collar and some toys are also sweet reminders of my feline charge. This mouse was a well-used plaything when we lived in Easthampton; the feel of the fur still fills me with love — both for her and for all the creatures (human and animal) that may come along.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
EASTHAMPTON, MA
7.26.2013

My Mother's Teddy Bear

My mother grew up on a small farmhouse, outside a rural town in the middle of Missouri, in absolute poverty. She was the youngest daughter of a poor farming couple, Everett and Hildred. Her older and only sibling, a sister, Vernie, was already 17 years old when my mom was born, and my mom was often by herself as a child.

My mom used to tell me stories of her childhood. How she would hide in the fields with stacks of books and read for an entire afternoon... or how she loved playing with the farm animals, as they felt like her only companions. She told me of how hard it was growing up never having anything store bought, and how she remembered her parents being very frugal, buying flour in bulk, 25 pounds at a time, and how it would always mold before they could use it all, but how they'd continue to eat it anyway, because they couldn't afford to do otherwise. And how she had to help her mother with canning, and how incredibly hot that kitchen got sometimes...

She also told me of how she felt less than, mocked and bullied... the kids from town would taunt her and make fun of her for not having two nickels to rub together... for being a poor farmer's daughter... for drinking water from a cistern

and not having town water... for having an outhouse and not a flush toilet... for having homemade dresses for school instead of one from a shop.

The one object that she did own, purchased from a store, her only prized possession, was a simple teddy bear. It had been a gift from her sister. And she loved it. It was her beloved friend and playmate. It joined her in the fields, sat with her at meal-times. She slept with it. She read to it. She told it her secrets, her hopes, her fears. It got her through the tough times and took away some of her loneliness. It was her constant companion. It completed her.

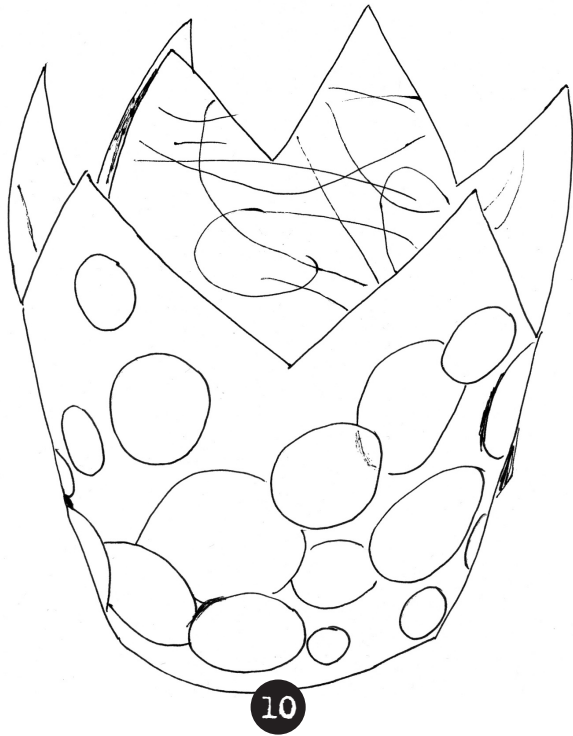
She loved patches of its fur off. All of its appendages, both arms and both legs, required reattachment surgery... some multiple times. It's even been decapitated and repaired. It's been split down the middle and stitched back together with some very thick red thread. It's taken a beating... But through it all, it's both given and received an enormous amount of love...

My mother committed suicide November 13, 2011 after a lifelong battle with major depression. It was a crushing and devastating loss. Cleaning up my mother's home and preparing for her memorial, my brother and I gathered up personal items to display at the funeral. We chose pictures, newspaper clippings, cards and crayon drawings. It was often overwhelmingly hard. But it was when I laid eyes on her shabby, worn out teddy bear, one whose body looked ravaged and raw and was held together by inadequate measures (much of how *I* was feeling emotionally)... that my heart broke open and I felt a tremendous wave of grief.

I hugged that bear to me and I cried. I cried for my mother's shitty little life. I cried for her pain and despair... I cried for her sadness and loneliness... I cried for her unfulfilled hopes and dreams... I cried that she had been widowed so young, and been cheated out of a loving relationship and never sought love again... I cried for her spirit... I cried for her love, her gentle, kind, and generous ways... I cried for her amazing empathy and compassionate manner... I cried for her mental illness robbing her of so much joy... I cried for her brokenness... I cried for all the regrets she had... I cried for her grandchildren... I cried for my brother and myself and mourned that we'd never again get to talk on the phone or laugh or hug...

And when I had released a great deal of my pain... I focused on the teddy bear... And breathed in his love and comfort and I didn't feel so terribly alone or broken.

Love that bear.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
SEEKONK, MA
7.27.2013

Birthday Crown

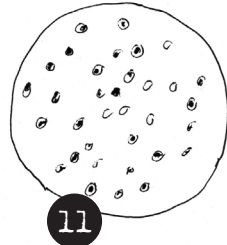
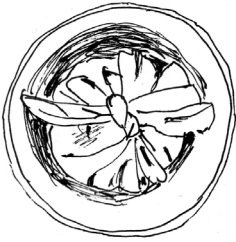
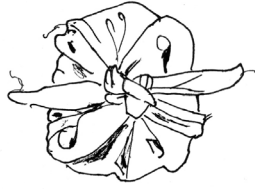
I grew up in a house that didn't celebrate birthdays exuberantly. They were quiet events, that were acknowledged, embraced and then we moved on.

When I met my partner, I was 35 years into this habit. Unlike me, she grew up in a household that celebrated birthdays enthusiastically. When we finally decided to have a child, we adopted the birthday culture of my partner's childhood.

This object was a present I received two years ago on my birthday. It was enclosed in a gift wrapped box that was weighted with another object. Until I opened the box, I had no idea what to expect. There was a very elaborate ritual my four year old explained on its use, that he dictated to his mother. "This was an object with magical powers to be used when I wanted to feel happy".

For me, the crown represents everything that I love about being a father and husband. A simple, mindful gift made with love and celebration.

I've kept it by my desk in my work space at home. I look at it every day as a reminder of how incredibly fortunate I am. At any time during the day I can wear a crown with a rainbow of polkadots and feel fabulous. At any time of the day I am reminded that the crown of fatherhood, of being a good husband, is worn with great responsibility and joy.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
SEEKONK, MA
7.29.2013

Dirt. Earth. Soil. Mud.

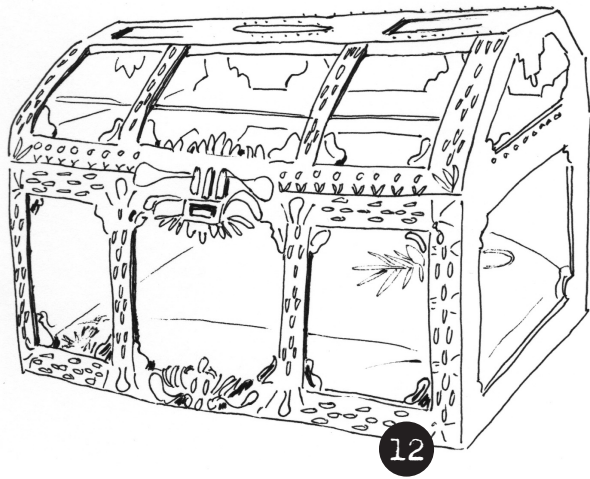
So many names for a single thing. Dirt. To some it looks like potting soil. To others it is something to clean off and wash.

Love is very much like dirt. Earth. It gives life, it promotes growth, it embraces death.

Invisible and frequently misunderstood as something sparkly and euphoric, love is alive, and it needs to breathe. It needs to exchange goods with other living beings. Love, like earth, is messy and it is also forgiving.

The smell of raindrops on a dusty sidewalk has always made me happy. Wet earth soon to become mud. Perhaps I have always longed for love yet mistook messiness with pain.

Now that the pain has ebbed, I can embrace the messiness. Love, like earth, is committed. To being what it is. Life inspiring.



CONTRIBUTED FROM
SALT LAKE CITY, UT
8.15.2013

Plastic Chest

This is an empty plastic chest my mother bought me for \$1 when I was a kid in one of our trips to El Paso, Texas, across the US-Mexican border. Love right now for me is a willingness to fill and be filled, but also an awareness and willingness to experience loss and emptiness, an openness to vulnerability. I feel it is a back and forth between connection and isolation. I'm experiencing the loss of the partner I hoped to share the rest of my life with, living the hurt of the distance between me and my sister, and becoming every-day more conscious about my aging parents.

Betty Crocker Boxtops

My parents have been together for over 40 years. They grew up poor, in western Massachusetts, in a small manufacturing town that eventually lost a lot of its businesses when outsourcing became commonplace. My extended family has never gotten along, and as a result, my parents faced an uphill battle in changing their lives and providing for my family.

Growing up, my mother always wore a pair of braided gold hoop earrings (which she still wears daily). In my early teens, I asked her why she would wear such boring earrings, every single day of the year, when the family was beginning its slow ascent to the middle class. She responded by telling me that, after her father-in-law whispered to her, "I give you one year" at her wedding reception that she was determined to make our lives growing up better than her own. And when she and my father were working multiple jobs, she clipped off every box top of every Betty Crocker item she purchased, finally amassing enough of them to get her first real jewelry: the gold hoops.

To me, love is about sticking it out over the long haul. Through extended family pressure and disdain, poverty, and hard work, my parents' marriage is one of the strongest I know of. Love is about working hard, scrimping, saving, and trusting that if you are truly committed, you'll clip those box tops as long as it takes to make sure that your family is taken care of.

Love is about hoping you can be a positive impact on the lives of those you touch.



13

CONTRIBUTED FROM
SALT LAKE CITY, UT
8.18.2013



CONTRIBUTED FROM
WEST VALLEY CITY, UT
9.2.2013

Sands of Lebanon

What is love? It is a link that is built blindly, little step-by-step. Fumbling, reaching out for each other in sharp shadows. To love is a decision of making echo from the silver and jade sea that forged inside of oneself. To love is to teach the jaguar how to swim in river made of quetzal's feathers. To love is to drink the fertile soil of Lebanon.

My mother Alicia's love prolonged my past, it kept for me an inception.

My Umi's love draw me a destiny marked by scimitars and laurels.

It gave me a name, a vine.

I am a Yapur.

¿Qué es el amor? Un vínculo que se va construyendo a ciegas, poquito a poco. A tientas buscando al otro entre sombras nítidas. Amar es la decisión de hacer eco al mar de plata y jade que se fraguó dentro de uno. Amar es enseñarle al jaguar a nadar en un río de plumas de quetzal. Amar es beber la tierra fecunda del Líbano.

El amor de mi madre Alicia, me prolongó el pasado, me guardó un origen.

El amor de mi Umi me trazó un destino marcado de cimitaras y laurel.

Me dio un nombre, una vid.

Soy un Yapur.

By Balam Yapur



CONTRIBUTED FROM
WASHINGTON, UT
10.1.2013

Here's to Girls' State

"Raise your voices, raise them high.

Sing to Girls' State and you'll find,
tomorrow's leaders of mankind."

— A line from a song sang for at Girls' State programs in every state of the union from 1947 until now.

I love Girls' State.

I'm not one to get uber gushy or sentimental about things, but when I see the pin I received at graduation, it reminds me of the love I have for this program and the experience I had as a citizen of Utah Girls' State.

Girls' State is a week long summer program sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary. Notable past participants in this program include women like Janet Napolitano, former Texas Governor Ann Richards, Jane Pauley and Hilary Clinton. It is a program run by women for girls to teach them about our government and themselves. Utah Girls' State was a unique environment in which I discovered several things about myself.

The summer of 1992 found me at a place in life where I was unsure of the space I deserved to occupy in this world. My experience that summer, propelled me into a life long quest to find a greater love for others, and a love of self.

I love Girls' State.



Key to my heart

The love I have for my children is all-encompassing. It began at the moment of birth and grows each day. It has been tested as the years go by, it has been challenged and it has been rewarded. Then come the grandchildren, if you're lucky, and a new kind of all-encompassing love fills your heart. There is all of the joy but very little of the angst and so it's much easier and not nearly as challenging. And then when your grandchildren are old enough to express their love for you — well that is the greatest reward. This drawing of 2 hearts and the key to her heart were drawn by Mikayla. It brings tears to my eyes whenever I see it. For me, this is a pure expression of love both from me to my grandchildren and from my granddaughter to her Grammy and her Grampy.

CONTRIBUTED FROM
QUECHEE, VT
10.4.2013

In Your Absence: The Frames Project

In Your Absence is a meditation on permanence and impermanence, the transitory nature of our lives and the longevity of the items we collect. How do we live, knowing that someday we will die? More, how do we live as parents knowing someday our children will die? Like the artifacts of the frames, our children are left behind to survive us, but they, too, will be outlived by their possessions.

I curated two related but separate collections for *In Your Absence*: photos of children from the 1960s and earlier as well as a series of used and vintage picture frames in all shapes and sizes. In the exhibit, the picture frames and photos are purposefully random—the relationship between photo and frame has been severed.

I find the photos to be so poignant. Each cost between 10¢ and \$4—what value would they have for someone who knew and loved the children pictured? Who are these people, and why are their photos orphaned? How unsettling to realize that even though these artifacts are paper ephemera, they will outlive the people pictured. Our lives are so brief.

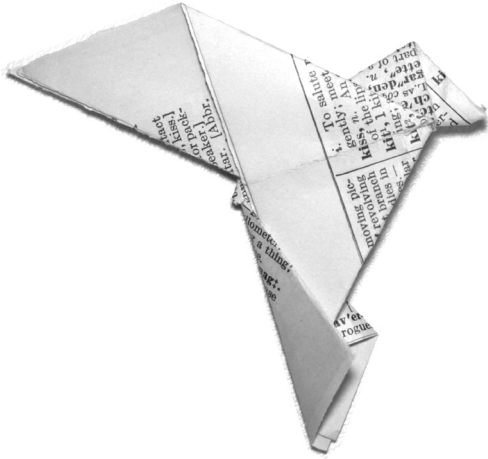
Even the glass in all of the frames is original and intact. They are wood, metal, plastic and glass, purchased to hold special images and sold or given away, fragile but enduring. The pictures and frames serve as memory and metaphor.

BOX CONSTRUCTION BY BRIAN BEDNARSKI



Butchie Sept 48

Kindness Curation



The impetus for *Kindness Curation* was to try to bring some lightness to my curatorial design work without being flippant or irrelevant.

Using Facebook and online question-and-answer forums I asked “If kindness was a color, what would it be?” I received 99 answers ranging from “black” to “bright green with sprinkles on top.” Using those results, the exhibit features 99 helium balloons—one color for each answer. At the end of the balloon strings is an origami mockingbird (symbolizing kindness from a quote in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: “Mockingbirds don’t do anything but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat people’s gardens, don’t nest in the corner, they don’t do one thing but just sing their hearts out for us.” Atticus Finch). These are folded dictionary pages in many languages, all of which include the word “kindness.”

Kindness is universally understood. By using the dictionary pages, the different languages and the nationalities they represent about each other, kindnesses touching, so unlike the world in which we actually live. The origami birds are a gift from me, a small kindness to serve as reminder.

This project encompassed four elements: one collection, the color of kindness; one curated collection, the dictionary pages; an element of making, the origami; and a more light-hearted, positive curatorial project which is still meaningful. The graphic design elements are interwoven with the curatorial methodology.

Still Life, Small Scale



The final collection. Two of the best years of my life, in 1:12 scale so I can hold their memory in the palm of my hand, always.

With gratitude

Jill and Stuart Tane

Ziddi Msgani

Brian Bednarski

Kerri Augustein

Loran Saito and family

Rachael Hatley

Gerrit DeVries

Richard Dixon

Jessica Blank

The Collective Collection participants
...and Mikayla and Tucker, essential as air